

The Turning Point

Esther 5:1-14 | Notes

Introduction

Let's take a moment to remember where we are in the story.

- **"Haman the Agagite"** has successfully turned the the full might of the most powerful nation on earth against the people of God. (3:10)
- An **"edict"** has gone out decreeing their complete **"annihilation"**—men, women, children...**NONE are to be spared.** (3:13)
- In the face of this suffering, Mordecai and all the Jews across the empire have been turned to the Lord in faith, in repentance, and in humility. (4:1-3)

However, at first, Esther was totally unaware that anything was going on at all. (4:4)

- But even when Mordecai told her the news Esther's heart was filled w/ fear. She was afraid to identify w/ her people & stand in their defense. (4:10-11)
- But Mordecai then preached a sermon of truth to Esther through which the Holy Spirit reminded her soul to measure her life decisions by eternity not by the present moment, and reminded her soul of God's unfailing faithfulness to his people in every hour and in every circumstance. (4:13-14)
- Moreover, Mordecai's words began to help Esther understand the wise and loving hand of God behind the painful events of her life.
- Mordecai began to help Esther realize that all the sorrows which had led her to be uprooted from her home and placed into the position of queen were indeed full of divine purpose—they were **"for such time as this"**. (4:14)

Like a good and faithful shepherd, God went after his lost sheep and moved Esther's heart from fear to faith.

- And by that renewed faith Esther now resolved to put her trust in the Lord—NOT in herself.
- Together with God's people throughout Susa, she spent **"three days"** in fasting and in prayer, calling upon the Lord. (4:16)
- Now, **"on the third day,"** she would approach the king to advocate for her people—even if doing so might cost her life. (5:1)

We need to understand: Esther's faith did not immediately change her circumstances. Her faith changed the way she related to her circumstances.

- Esther's faith gave her courage in the face of persecution because she now knew—with Spirit-wrought certainty in the depths of her heart—that her God was with her, and that it was he, not her enemies who was in control of all things, turning them to accomplish his own holy, perfect, and un-improvable ends—for the everlasting glory of his name and the everlasting good of his people.
- Therefore, **because Esther now BELIEVED, she was able to walk in that faith instead of hiding in fear.**

This passage marks **THE TURNING POINT** of the book where all that was evil begins to be toppled and turned by God for good. (Rom. 8:28)

- We won't see the full picture of that turning point this week because it spreads across the remainder of the entire book.
- Throughout the remaining chapters of this book, one by one, we will see God take the very things which the enemies of his people meant for harm and turn them for their good. (Gen. 50:20) We will literally see the enemies of God's people build the "gallows" of their own defeat & destruction. (Ps. 141:10)
- But for today, our focus will simply be on the next step of the story where Esther begins to walk by courageous faith rather than crippling fear.
- Moreover, we will see Esther's loving Father in heaven meet her in that posture of humble faith with divine **"favor"** that changed everything. (Read v1-8)

There are **3** beautiful pictures for us to see here: **(1) A Picture of Faith, (2) A Picture of Christ, and (3) A Picture of Wisdom**

I. A Picture of Faith

In the year 155 A.D. a Christian man named Polycarp, pastor of the Church at Smyrna, was arrested & sentenced to death by the Roman authorities.

- He was arrested because of his refusal to take an oath which involved the worship of the Emperor/Caesar—something in conflict with his faith.
- When Polycarp was brought out before the crowd that day, everyone could see his frailty as an elderly man—he was 86 years old at the time.
- Perhaps ashamed to be seen as taking the life of someone so weak, the proconsul offered Polycarp a way of escape:

"JUST TAKE THE OATH AND I WILL LET YOU GO. JUST REVILE CHRIST AND YOU WILL BE SET FREE."

- If Polycarp refused he would be burned alive at the stake. His response to the proconsul's offer has resounded throughout the ages of history:
"FOR EIGHTY AND SIX YEARS I HAVE BEEN CHRIST'S SERVANT AND HE HAS DONE ME NO WRONG. HOW CAN I NOW BLASPHEME MY KING WHO SAVED ME?"
- Polycarp then offered prayer in the name of the triune God and willingly gave up his life rather than deny or dishonor his Lord, Jesus Christ.

This is something like what Esther was facing now, isn't it? Can you imagine being in Esther's shoes?

- Can you imagine waking up on the day that you know you will now risk your life by faith? Can you imagine *choosing* to put one foot in front of the other as you walk to the king's court? Can you imagine intentionally standing in the threshold, willingly putting yourself into the king's gaze?
- Moreover, an executioner always stood behind the Persian king's throne with an axe in his hands, ready to punish those who broke the king's laws.
- As Esther **"stood in the...court"** she would have been able to see this axe as the soldier stood behind the king whose law she was about to break.
- **True saving faith is not an abstract theory or a subjective feeling. It is a God-given belief in the soul that leads to actual practices in the life.** (1 Jn. 1:6)
- It is one thing to say, "If I perish, I perish". It is another thing entirely to actually walk into the throne room of the King knowing it may cost your life.
- Just like it is one thing try cry "Lord Lord" & quite another thing entirely to actually walk in submission to God's will as revealed in his Word. (Mt. 7:21-23)
- Esther is a picture of faith because being moved from fear to faith did not simply mean she **talked the talk**. It meant she **walked the walk**. (1 Jn. 1:6; 2:5-6)
- And for Esther, that walk of faith meant she would now willingly put herself into a position of death in the hope of bringing life to God's people.

A Picture of Christ

Did you notice which day it was that Esther's impending death was turned to life? It was **"on the third day"**—and that should sound familiar. (I Cor. 15:1-4)

- It was **"on the third day"** that the scepter of the king's mercy was held out to Esther giving her safe passage through the storm of Haman's wrath. (v2)
- It was **"on the third day"** that Esther's sentence of death was turned into a sentence of life both for her and later for her people—God's chosen ones.
- By faith, Esther willingly stood beneath the threat which hung over the heads of her people in order to take that threat upon herself & deliver them.

In this way, Esther was a faint picture foreshadowing the greater glory of the greater Savior and only hope for sinners—the Lord Jesus Christ! (Acts 4:12)

- Esther could have stayed hidden. But instead, by faith, she willingly placed herself in front of her people, ready to suffer, if necessary, for the hope of their protection in order to obtain their deliverance from the judgment against them.
- In a far greater way, Jesus left his heavenly throne to willingly take on flesh & place himself in front of his people as their Mediator, Advocate, & Representative, in order to offer his own life as a substitutionary sacrifice for the their sins and accomplish their everlasting deliverance. (I Jn. 4:9-10)
- By faith, *Esther risked all*. But *the Lord Jesus Christ actually gave all*—& not just *for us*, but *instead of us*—he **lived & died in the place of his people**.
- Jesus **LIVED** the righteous life that we have all failed to live and he gives all who trust in him that perfect righteousness as if it were their own.
- Jesus **DIED** the death we deserve for our sins & he did this in our place so that every scrap of condemnation against his people has been paid in full.
- The **"golden scepter"** was held out to Esther—and is held out to us forever!—**because it WASN'T held out to Christ who offered himself in our place.**
- **"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."** (I Pt. 2:24)

A Picture of Wisdom

Esther's faith in God's sovereignty did not mean she no longer took responsibility to exercise wisdom & winsomeness in her approach.

- Esther did not say: *"Since God is sovereign and already has a plan, therefore it doesn't matter how I approach the king, just that I approach him."*
- No, Esther understood something that we too must not forget: **God's absolute sovereignty does not remove our human responsibility.** (Stewardship)
- **While it is absolutely true that we leave the outcome to God, and know that only he can change hearts and minds by his own power, we are still called to do all that we can to represent our Lord and his Word with WISDOM to the world.** (Tit. 2:7-10; I Pt. 2:11-12)
- **Now, this is a truth that is often abused.** People use the call to be *"loving"* *"wise"* & *"winsome"* as a hiding place for their sinful fear of man, for their sinful desire to be liked, and for their shame about certain aspects of the Lord Jesus Christ, his teaching, & his commands for the world. (Mk. 8:38; Lk. 6:26)
- But just b/c something is abused does not mean it is not still a good thing when undertaken rightly. Esther gives us a wonderful example to follow.

1. Notice, Esther did not show up to the king's court in her pajamas. She **"put on her royal robes"** and followed proper decorum & protocol. (v1)

- In other words, Esther did all she could to present herself to the *(potentially hostile)* king in such a way that was most likely to obtain his favor.
- She did not add any offense to the presentation of her plea. Instead, she adorned her efforts with every suitable endearment. (I Cor. 10:32; II Cor. 6:3)
- **We should do the same in our presentation of Christ to the world and in our bold stand for truth.** If we would be faithful to God, then we **must** walk into the hostile environments and social situations of this world and openly present our gospel plea regardless of what may come—we cannot hide.
- **But, like Esther, we should also take care to dress our gospel pleas in the beautiful robes of "gentleness & respect," of care & humility.** (I Pt. 3:14-16)
- It is **NOT** unloving to tell the truth. The truth of God's Word **WILL** offend a lost and sinful world. There is **NO WAY** to be faithful to Christ & avoid this.
- **But there are ways of telling the truth & standing boldly for Christ which add UNNECESSARY OFFENSE to the gospel & we must strive against this.**

2. Notice also that Esther did not immediately present her request and forcefully pressure the king to make a choice on the spot. (v4)

- Instead, through a **"feast,"** Esther sought an opportunity to demonstrate her *loyalty, good will,* and *service* to the king **before presenting her plea.**
- Esther sought to gain the *relational credibility* with the king that she knew she would need in order for her request to gain a *sympathetic hearing.*
- **We should do the same in our presentation of Christ to the world and in our bold stand for truth.** Do not misunderstand: Sometimes we have only a moment to share Christ with a stranger. Seize that moment by faith! Present the truth in a biblically faithful way to as many people as God allows!
- But, at the same time, as much as possible, we too should seek to first demonstrate **our genuine care for others** and **our commitment to their best interests** by the way we relate to them relationally with wisdom & love. We do this **chiefly** because it is simply right to treat people this way. (Mt. 22:39)
- But also so that **when the opportunity comes for us to present Christ, to call them to repentance for their sins, to submit themselves wholly to God's will as revealed in his Word, and to be baptized into the membership of his Church, those people will hear our words as coming from someone who they KNOW they can trust, & who they KNOW cares for them**—even if they disagree with and disbelieve what we are saying.
- This is what Esther wisely sought to do by first inviting the king to a feast where she could demonstrate her character in the hope of winning his ear.

The first threat of death has now passed & the door has been opened wide for Esther to stand before the king & plead for the salvation of her people.

- Do not miss this truth hidden in the pages of the book of Esther: **The key which opened the door and led to this turning point was the key of faith.**
- It was as God's people walked by faith and not by sight that they began to see the Lord's good purpose and faithfulness to his promises all around.
- It was as God's people walked by faith and not by sight that "the unseen hand of God" became as clear to them as the noonday sun. (II Chron. 20:15-17)

Application:

May we too know that "the battle is not ours but God's" & therefore stand firm in trials, be bold in truth, and walk in Christlike faith.

